UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FIFTY-FIRST SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)
7th meeting
held on
Tuesday, 22 October 1996
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KITTIKHOUN (Lao People's Democratic Republic)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 82: EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 92: THE SITUATION IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF CROATIA

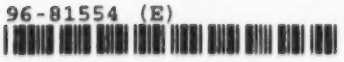
ORGANIZATION OF WORK

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of the publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.4/51/SR.7
4 September 1997
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

96-81554 (E)



The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 82: EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (continued) (A/51/46; A/C.4/51/L.3/Rev.1)

1. Mr. KYRYCHENKO (Ukraine) said that he welcomed the decision of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation to consider the effects of ionizing radiation on plants and animals in the environment. The Chernobyl disaster, which had changed the lives of millions in the region, had been felt mostly by Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation, and it had left the affected populations in a state of uncertainty about the future of their children.

2. Because of the global scope of the disaster, particular attention and special assistance to the countries concerned was required to deal with its consequences. The very future of mankind was at stake. It was Ukraine's hope that the United Nations and the international community would continue to create the conditions needed, especially materially and financially, to allow Ukraine to honour its commitment to close the Chernobyl nuclear power plant by the year 2000.

3. Despite its economic difficulties, Ukraine was still doing everything in its power to minimize the consequences of the disaster, to clean up the environment and to carry out welfare programmes for the affected population, but it was unable, by itself, to solve such a large-scale problem as the transformation of the "sarcophagus" built to contain the exploded reactor into an ecologically safe system. Two hundred tons of nuclear fuel still remained in the "sarcophagus", not to speak of the thousands of tons of radioactive waste stored in the Chernobyl area, which constituted a serious danger and a real subject of concern.

4. In order to transform the "sarcophagus" into a safe facility, it was necessary to begin immediately to launch an integrated programme, which would include stabilizing the structure housing the destroyed reactor, emptying the reactor of its highly radioactive fuel and disposing of it in accordance with international rules, and deactivating and dismantling the "sarcophagus" and the destroyed reactor. To tackle such a complex problem, Ukraine needed the help and the concerted efforts of international organizations and financial institutions. There was no other alternative.

5. Ukraine invited all States and international organizations, pursuant to resolution 50/134 adopted by the General Assembly at its previous session, to provide technical and financial assistance to the scientific and technological research programmes being conducted under the auspices of the International Scientific and Technological Centre recently established in Chernobyl.

6. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that Mongolia had asked to participate in the debate. Although the list of speakers was closed, he suggested that the Committee should grant that request.

7. It was so decided.

8. Mr. MOREIRA GARCIA (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the member States of Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) as well as Bolivia and Chile, underscored the importance those countries attached to atomic radiation issues, and observed that the ongoing scientific and technological advances should never make one lose sight of the human being, who must ultimately benefit from them. Their Governments had always emphasized the importance of the Scientific Committee's work, especially its gathering of information on the sources and effects of ionizing radiation, which served as the basis for the recommendations of the International Commission on Radiological Protection. The Scientific Committee had also done a detailed worldwide survey of the radiation exposures of workers in various professions.

9. The Scientific Committee's role was obviously an important one, since its technical studies were very useful for countries that had been exposed to atomic radiation. The growing complexity of such questions called for a determined effort to arouse public opinion and to enable the international community to find viable and effective solutions.

10. The Scientific Committee's reports consisted of succinct summaries of its activities during the previous year. The scientific annexes were a matter for specialists. It should be recalled that during the debates of the Open-Ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, it had been proposed that the Scientific Committee should submit its report also the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and to the World Health Organization (WHO) and that the General Assembly should consider the report together with the IAEA and WHO assessments of it.

11. Mr. TARAR (Pakistan) noted with satisfaction the publication of the Scientific Committee's fourteenth comprehensive report, which provided an evaluation of the sources and effects of ionizing radiation, and recommended that it should be widely disseminated in the scientific community and to the public at large.

12. The enormous risk posed to man and the environment by atomic radiation called for urgent action. In particular, the large stockpiles of nuclear weapons must be destroyed. The measures taken under the START I and II agreements were not enough, because the parties concerned would still be allowed to retain 3,000 nuclear warheads and there was no plan to destroy even those that had been dismantled.

13. Pakistan had supported the adoption of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, despite its shortcomings, for it hoped that banning nuclear tests would save the people of various territories from the hazards of nuclear emissions. Even if the Treaty did not enter into force owing to the intransigence of one country, Pakistan hoped that all nuclear-test sites would be closed.

14. While every effort should be made to save humanity from nuclear radiation, it should not be denied the fruits of peaceful uses of nuclear energy, which developed countries should share equitably with developing countries, without discrimination or selective restrictions. The exchange of technology and information on nuclear safety was an important aspect of the transfer of nuclear technology. IAEA was to be commended for the effective role it had played in disseminating that type of information, and Pakistan hoped it would be more

widely disseminated. The provision of safety equipment at all nuclear sites was important for global safety.

15. In conclusion, his delegation fully supported the Scientific Committee in the realization of its objectives.

16. Mr. SYARGEEU (Belarus) said that the Chernobyl catastrophe had affected a fifth of the population of Belarus and caused damage on the order of US$ 235 billion, an amount equivalent to 32 annual national budgets. Notwithstanding international assistance, Belarus was dealing with the after-effects of the disaster on its own. At the same time, it was evident that the problem was a long-term one of unprecedented complexity, which could not be resolved without the concerted efforts of the entire international community, as had recently been confirmed during the scientific conferences organized to mark the tenth anniversary of Chernobyl.

17. The conference participants had recognized that the health conditions of the affected population were worsening progressively and that the dramatic increase in cases of thyroid cancer in children and teenagers was caused by the radioactive fallout from the disaster. The conclusions of the conferences confirmed the need to intensify international cooperation and carry on with scientific research. It should be recalled that the United Nations Secretary-General had launched an appeal to that effect. His delegation hoped that the Scientific Committee would take account of the conclusions of the conferences and incorporate them into its 1997 report.

18. Belarus needed the support of the entire international community. While it appreciated the work being done by the United Nations to initiate and coordinate activities aimed at finding a solution to the Chernobyl problem, his Government was seriously concerned by the fact that, at a time when the closing of the Chernobyl nuclear power plan was being discussed, the search for a solution to the medical and environmental consequences of the disaster, for which Belarus was bearing the main burden, was being relegated to the background. He drew the attention of delegations to two important initiatives put forward by the President of Belarus, namely, the creation of an international scientific centre to study Chernobyl-related problems, and the creation of a fund for the protection of the planet which could be supported by a part of the enormous profits of corporations working in the nuclear field. Belarus hoped that the United Nations, through the Scientific Committee, would support those initiatives.

19. His Government had set up a new State programme to resolve the post-Chernobyl problems. The Scientific Committee was urged to make its contribution to the scientific efforts being made to determine ways of cleaning up the contaminated regions.

20. He welcomed the report of the Scientific Committee, but he did wonder to what extent it had taken into consideration in its assessment the results of similar research carried out in countries affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe. For example, research and specific scientific projects were being carried out in Belarus at the Polessje State Radiation and Ecological Reservation on, amongst other things, the effects of atomic radiation on plants and animals. International financial support was needed to carry out those projects, which

were in the practical interests of the entire international community. He called upon the scientific community, UNDP, UNEP and all interested countries to provide such assistance. For its part, his Government was ready to strengthen cooperation with the Scientific Committee by encouraging contacts between that Committee and the Belarus National Commission on Radiation Protection.

21. On the issue of the future of the Scientific Committee, his delegation was deeply concerned by the move to exclude discussion of the report of the Scientific Committee from the agenda of the General Assembly, and to reassign certain tasks carried out by the Scientific Committee to IAEA or WHO, which would lead to its abolition. His delegation was convinced that the proposals to that effect contained in document WGUNS/CRP.10, which was being considered by the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, would not contribute to the strengthening of the role of the Organization. The report of the Scientific Committee, notwithstanding its technical nature, was of great political importance; if the Scientific Committee no longer existed, the world community would lose a source of impartial and high-quality information on the effects of radiation on health and the environment. For that reason, the delegations of Belarus, Argentina, Egypt and other countries which were members of the Working Group had ensured that amendments had been made to the above-mentioned working document with the aim of retaining the report of the Scientific Committee on the agenda of the General Assembly.

22. Mr. LAU Ngan Siew (Malaysia) welcomed the contribution made by the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation since its inception 41 years earlier to greater knowledge and understanding of the levels and effects of radiation and its underlying risks for mankind and the environment. The Committee had made efforts to compile and publish relevant data on radiation doses and the dangers from various sources of radiation, and had thus helped to improve standards of radiation protection and environmental quality throughout the world.

23. The greatest nuclear risks posed by atomic radiation came from the operation of unsafe nuclear power plants, the abandoning and dumping at sea of old nuclear submarines, illicit trafficking in nuclear materials, nuclear testing and, of course, the use of nuclear weapons.

24. The threat of massive global radioactive contamination would persist as long as there were nuclear weapons forming part of the defence strategy of the nuclear-weapon States. The international community should therefore continue its efforts in the area of nuclear disarmament with a view to the total elimination of such weapons. The advisory opinion handed down by the International Court of Justice on 8 July 1996 on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons should give a boost to those seeking to mobilize public opinion against the very existence of nuclear weapons. The adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty towards the end of the fiftieth session was another step in the right direction. Unfortunately, the Treaty had a number of flaws, including the controversial provisions for its entry into force. Although serious doubts remained about the viability of the Treaty, his delegation hoped that it would enjoy universal support and that, in the meantime, the moratoria on nuclear testing would continue to be observed.

25. It was imperative that nuclear-weapon States should honour their commitment to work towards general and complete nuclear disarmament, as provided for in the preamble to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. If the international community was to achieve the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons, it should look carefully at a number of interesting proposals which had been made on the subject, particularly the programme of action jointly tabled by the 28 non-aligned and neutral countries that were members of the Conference on Disarmament, and also the proposals contained in the report of the Canberra Commission.

26. The Moscow Nuclear Safety and Security Summit Declaration of April 1996 outlined measures which could be taken to ensure the safety of ageing Chernobyl-type nuclear power plants, while waiting for them to be phased out. The issue of the safety of nuclear power plants continued to be a major concern in Europe and throughout the world. The highest priority had to be given to improving safety in those plants or closing them down, since they were a potential source of nuclear catastrophes.

27. With regard to the illicit trafficking of nuclear materials, it was essential to keep a close eye on demilitarized nuclear materials and to ensure the social and financial well-being of the scientists and engineers who had previously been working in the nuclear field, so that they would not be tempted to indulge in an illicit trade.

28. The practice of dumping ageing nuclear submarines at sea or abandoning them at old naval bases where security measures were inadequate had to be stopped, and abandoned submarines should be recovered before they could cause irreparable damage to the ocean environment. The issue of the cost and funding of nuclear disarmament should also be carefully considered. The Moscow Nuclear Safety and Security Summit was a step in the right direction with regard to addressing those critical issues in a more coordinated manner.

29. In conclusion, he assured the Scientific Committee that his delegation would cooperate fully in helping it achieve its objectives, and that his delegation would continue to participate in its activities, including its extensive survey of occupational radiation exposure. His delegation was therefore becoming a co-sponsor of draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.3/Rev.1.

30. Mr. MIRANDA (Peru) said that his Government attached special importance to the work of the Scientific Committee; its scientific competence and the independence of its findings had been widely acknowledged and, since its inception 41 years earlier, it had carried out studies and research of vital importance for the scientific and technical advancement of mankind, in such fundamental areas as food, health and the environment. His delegation wished to become a co-sponsor of draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.3/Rev.1, which he was sure would be adopted by consensus.

31. Mr. ENKHSAIKHAN (Mongolia) welcomed the report under consideration, particularly the scientific annex entitled "The effects of radiation on the environment". His delegation attached great importance to the work of the Scientific Committee, which it considered extremely useful in that it made a significant contribution to research to determine levels of radiation and their effects on the environment and population. His delegation also felt that the

Scientific Committee should be more responsive to the needs of Member States seeking help to measure the harmful effects of atomic radiation. For example, the Scientific Committee could provide those countries with technical advice on the methodology for determining the level of radiation in affected areas. His delegation's informal discussions with members of the Scientific Committee and prospective co-sponsors of the draft resolution under consideration had given him to understand that the concerns of some affected States would somehow be taken into consideration in the further work of the Committee. His delegation hoped to be able to discuss those points with the members of the Committee and all other interested parties.

32. In conclusion, he announced that his country had decided to become a co-sponsor of draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.3/Rev.1.

Draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.3/Rev.1

33. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Russian Federation, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand and the Philippines had become co-sponsors of draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.3/Rev.1. In response to the request made by some Member States at the consultations of that draft resolution held on 17 October 1996, the Secretariat of the Committee would provide some details of the mandate and financial situation of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation.

34. Mr. KHAN (Secretary of the Committee) recalled that the membership of the Scientific Committee, established by General Assembly resolution 913 (X), had initially comprised 15 Member States. That figure had later been increased to 20 by resolution 3154 (XXVIII), and currently stood at 21. In its resolution 913 (X), the General Assembly had requested the Scientific Committee to assemble, study and disseminate information on observed levels of ionizing radiation and radioactivity in the environment, and on the effects of such radiation upon man and his environment. Thus, the mandate of the Scientific Committee was to address concerns of a general nature expressed by the Member States regarding the hazards of ionizing radiation. Initially, and until 1980, the primary concerns of the Scientific Committee had been the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, the spread of radioactive fallout throughout the world and its health implications. The Scientific Committee had also evaluated other releases of radioactive materials to the environment such as those from nuclear fuel cycle installations or from accidents, such as the one at Chernobyl, and it also reviewed radiation doses from the natural background radiation, medical radiation exposures and occupational exposures. It also reviewed epidemiological and radiobiological studies to evaluate the health effects and risks of radiation exposures. The published reports of the Scientific Committee had been widely used for comparative purposes and to resolve questions of radiation effects.

35. Although the Scientific Committee had not been in a position to review specific problems of Member States, for example by sending investigatory missions, it could nevertheless take account of research or measurement results in such situations to the extent that the information provided was relevant to the sources, effects and risks of ionizing radiation. The secretariat of the Scientific Committee operated under a minimal budget, without any provision for

meeting the cost of travel, research or investigative work and comprised only one Professional and two General Service staff members.

36. Mr. PEREZ-GRIFFO (Spain) asked for the text of the statement by the Secretary of the Scientific Committee to be distributed to enable his delegation to refer to the resolutions on its mandate.

37. Mr. MEIER-KLODT (Germany) said that the draft resolution under consideration was the result of consultations which the co-sponsors and delegations concerned had held in order to review certain suggestions made by the delegation of the Marshall Islands. At the conclusion of those consultations it had been agreed, on the proposal of the Marshall Islands, to insert a new preambular paragraph specifically referring to the views expressed by the Member States at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly in regard to the work of the Scientific Committee and to add to paragraph 2 of the resolution the following phrase: "and calls for the Scientific Committee to ensure the widest possible distribution of this scientific annex to Member States". Furthermore, the participants in the consultations had considered that they were not for the time being in a position to decide on issues having wider political implications and that further reflection was required on the status of draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.3/Rev.1, bearing in mind the mandate of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. In that connection, he thanked the Secretary of the Fourth Committee for the clarifications he had given.

38. In view of the need to consider further how a draft resolution which had previously been seen mainly as a procedural matter should be approached in the future, the participants in the consultations had suggested that such consideration should begin well before the opening of the next session of the General Assembly. As the Committee had limited financial resources, several delegations had also asked for other possible courses of action to be considered.

39. He proposed that the draft resolution under consideration should be adopted without a vote.

40. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.3/Rev.1 without a vote.

41. Draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.3/Rev.1 was adopted without a vote.

42. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda item 82.

AGENDA ITEM 92: THE SITUATION IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF CROATIA

43. Mr. NOBILO (Croatia) proposed that consideration of agenda item 92 be deferred until the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

44. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to the request of the Croatian delegation.

45. It was so decided.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

46. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee would take a decision on Monday, 28 October on the texts contained in document A/C.4/51/L.4 (draft resolution on Western Sahara), A/C.4/51/L.5 (draft decision on Gibraltar) and A/C.4/51/L.6 (draft resolution on offers by Member States of study and training facilities). On Tuesday, 29 October, the Committee would begin its consideration of agenda item 84 (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). Delegations wishing to take part in the general debate were requested to add their names as soon as possible to the list of speakers.

47. Mr. ZAKI (Egypt) asked the Secretariat to indicate the date on which the report on UNRWA would be issued as his delegation would like sufficient time to study it.

48. The CHAIRMAN said that the report was due to be issued on Monday, 28 October.

49. Mr. ZAKI (Egypt) said that, in that case, his delegation would only have one day to study the report and that it would therefore have difficulty in considering item 84 on Tuesday, 29 October. He asked whether the report could be made available on Friday, 25 October, otherwise consideration of the item would have to be deferred until Tuesday, 30 October.

50. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic) associated himself with the statement by the representative of Egypt. He added that consideration of item 84 was important for many delegations and that, if the report were not to be issued before Monday, 28 October, consideration of the item would have to be held over for several days in order to give his delegation time to study it.

51. The CHAIRMAN said that he had just consulted the Secretary who considered the remarks by the Egyptian and Syrian delegations to be fully justified. He proposed that item 84 be taken up on 30 October, two days after the issuance of the report, and pointed out that decisions on the subject would be taken only during the second week in November.

52. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic) said that he would have preferred not to have any objection to raise but that the proposed time frame seemed to him to be too short. Noting that the Committee would not meet for several days, he thought that the Secretariat might take the necessary steps to accede to his delegation's request.

53. The CHAIRMAN appreciated the concerns of the Syrian delegation but said that the Committee had a work programme which, according to the Secretariat, could not be altered. He again appealed to the Syrian delegation to accept his proposal.

54. Mr. ZAKI (Egypt) said that his delegation fully understood the situation and did not see any reason why item 84 should not be considered on Wednesday, 30 October. That having been said, his delegation felt it essential to draw the Committee's attention to the fact that the Secretariat should ensure the timely issuance of documentation, since the matter was not just a question of form.

55. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation, out of a wish to show cooperation, accepted the Chairman's proposal but insisted that documents should be distributed on time.

56. The CHAIRMAN thanked the Egyptian and Syrian delegations for their cooperation and assured them that the Secretariat would do everything in its power to ensure the timely issuance of documentation. With respect to the items concerning decolonization on which the Committee had completed its general debate he recalled that, in accordance with established practice, the closing date for the submission of draft proposals on item 19 or of amendments to the recommendations of the Special Committee, with the exception of the item on Western Sahara, had been set at Tuesday, 29 October at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.